

RADHIKA PLEASE PUT IN ALL THE ADDRESSES, INCLUDING VNN

[April 21, 2002 is the Appearance Anniversary of Lord Sri Rama. On this auspicious occasion, we thought our respected readers may like to receive a copy of a letter written By Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja to a devotee, on the subject of Tulasi dasa's Rama-carita-manasa. This letter was previously published on the Internet in 1996.]

Badger, CA – USA  
June 29, 1996

Dear Bhakti-vaidurya Madhava Maharaja,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Sri Sri Guru and Gauranga. I have received your letter dated June 21, 1996. Because I am presently on tour, I was delayed in responding to your letter. Please forgive me for this.

I have read your letter, and in this regard I want to say that you should not take My response as that of an opponent, but rather as that of a friend. For about fifty-five years I have had the good fortune to associate with very learned disciples of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura Prabhupada who are deeply conversant with all the conclusions of sastra. As a result, I had the opportunity to hear from and serve many of the most prominent disciples, such as My Gurudeva, as well as pujiyapada Sri Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, pujiyapada Srauti Maharaja, pujiyapada Giri Maharaja, pujiyapada Gosvami Maharaja, pujiyapada Vaikhanasa Maharaja, pujiyapada Puri Maharaja, pujiyapada Madhava Maharaja and pujiyapada Sridhara Maharaja.

I consider Srila Swami Maharaja my siksa-guru. I have had his association and have served him since 1946. By virtue of my being his siksa disciple, my faith in him and service to him is no less than any member of ISKCON. As a senior devotee of advanced age and experience, and due to my long-term intimate and affectionate friendship with him, he would show me a preferential respect, superior even to that which he offered his disciples. Kindly take note of all these facts first, and then consider what I am about to explain.

I would like to begin by explaining that I did not, as you infer in your letter to me, choose to bring up this discussion in public for the purpose of disparaging or minimizing the authenticity of ISKCON. And I would like it to be known that this current 'controversy' is being stirred up by ISKCON, and not by myself.

For your information, Tulasi dasaji was a Vaisnava belonging to the Ramananda Sampradaya, a branch of the Sri Sampradaya. All the four Vaisnava Sampradayas are worthy of our respect. His name, Tulasi dasa, is a Vaisnava name and he wore the vertical (urddhva-pundra) Vaisnava tilaka. He also wore tulasi mala around his neck and was initiated into the sri-rama-mantra, which is a mantra for obtaining perfection. His guru was siddha Narahari (Nrsimha deva) dasa. His worshipful Deities were Sri Sita-Ramacandra, who are incarnations of Sri Radha-Krsna. In his numerous books he often

glorified Vrajendranandana Krsna. He explained the prominent glories of sri-nama, especially for the age of Kali. He translated the Sanskrit slokas of the Vedas, Upanisads, Puranas, Srimad-Bhagavatam, and especially the Ramayana, into Hindi poetical verse. He has written on the importance of saranagati, and he accepted bhagavad-prema as the highest goal and object for the jivas. He accepted the nine forms of bhakti described in the Srimad-Bhagavatam. He accepted the jivas to be the separated parts-and-parcels of the Lord, as has been explained in the Gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam. He also accepted the doctrine of acintya bheda-abheda or, in other words, the simultaneous oneness and difference which exists between the omnipotent Lord and His potency (sakti-saktiman). He completely disregarded sayujya-mukti and the other forms of liberation. Throughout his writings he refuted the theory of mayavada. Therefore, he has not expressed mayavada conclusions in any of his writings.

It is incorrect to think that Sriman Madhvacarya has accepted only the Valmiki Ramayana as authoritative. In his commentary on a statement from the Skanda Purana he has written as follows (quoted in Gaudiya Kanthahra):

rg yajuh samatharvacca bharatam pancaratrakam  
mula-ramayanan caiva sastram ityabhidiyate  
yac canukulam etasya tac ca sastram prakirttitam  
ato 'nya grantha vistaro naiva sastram kuvartma tat

"The four Vedas – Rg, Yayur, Sama and Atharva – the Mahabharata, the original Ramayana, and the Pancaratra are all authoritative and bona fide scriptures. Any scriptures which follow in support of them are all accepted as authoritative. All other scriptures apart from these are not accepted as authoritative."

Srila Swami Maharaja supports the very same conclusion as seen in the following quotes:

"According to Srila Rupa Gosvami, any book which gives enlightenment in the matter of advancing in devotional service is considered to be revealed scripture. Srila Madhvacarya has also defined revealed scriptures as referring to books such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas, Upanisads, Vedanta – and any other literature written in pursuance of such revealed scriptures." (NOD Chapter 12)

"Therefore we have to gather knowledge from the right source. Indeed, in reality we can get knowledge only from the Vedic sources. The four Vedas, with their supplementary Puranas, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and their corollaries, which are known as smrtis, are all authorized sources of knowledge. If we are at all to gather knowledge, we must gather it from these sources without hesitation." (CC Adi 5.14 – Purport)

"The Rg Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, Atharva Veda, Mahabharata, Pancaratra and the original Valmiki Ramayana are all Vedic literatures. Any literature following the conclusive statements of this Vedic literature is also to be considered Vedic literature. That literature which does not conform to Vedic literature is simply misleading." (CC Madhya 6.147)

The conclusion is that all scriptures which give favorable support to these literatures are also accepted as bona fide and authoritative. Otherwise, all the books of Sri Ramanuja, Sri Rupa Gosvami, Srila Jiva Gosvami and Srila Kaviraja Gosvami could not be accepted as authoritative. There are no learned scholars or acaryas of other sampradayas who wrote commentaries on any of the books of Srila Rupa Gosvami, Jiva Gosvami or Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami. Yet these books certainly cannot be said to be inauthentic. It is irrelevant to say that Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami did not accept evidence from the Ramayana of Tulasi dasa, because at that time it had not yet been published, for Tulasi dasa was a contemporary of Sri Rupa Gosvami.

I would like to point out to you that you have also cited the verse of Sri Madhvacarya twice in your letter to me. The first reference you give is from Srila Swami Maharaja's Caitanya-caritamrta Madhya 147, although you neglect to mention what chapter of Madhya-lila it was from. I have also cited Srila Swami Maharaja's translation of this verse above. For some reason when you quoted this statement, you omitted the sentence which would have refuted your argument and which, coincidentally, appears precisely in the middle of Swami Maharaja's translation: "Any literature following the conclusive statements of this Vedic literature is also to be considered Vedic literature."

Although we are substantiating the authority of Tulasi Ramayana, the question may be asked why we don't regard it on the same level as the Gaudiya Vaisnava literature. The reason for this is that although, according to Vaisnava siddhanta, it is accepted as bhakti scripture in a routine sense, it does not present a complete description of raganuga (or rupanuga) rasamayi bhakti. In a similar fashion, the Visnu Purana and other sastras do not propound krsna-bhakti-rasa, although they are certainly bhakti scriptures. Therefore we accept Srimad-Bhagavatam and the books of Sri Rupa, Sanatana and other Gosvamis as being the most authoritative and efficacious for us.

If, as you wrote in your letter to me, Tulasi dasa's writing in Hindi is a disqualification, then must we conclude that the Caitanya-caritamrta of Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami, and the Gita and Bhagavatam translations and purports of param-pujyapada Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, due to being written in Bengali and English respectively, are also inauthentic?

The book Prema-sagara is a Hindi translation of Srimad-Bhagavatam, done by the well-known mayavadi Sri Santanu Dvivedi. The Tulasi Ramayana, however, is a book translated by a highly reputed perfected soul of deep spiritual realization. If Srila Tulasi dasa was indeed a mayavadi, then kindly present some concrete evidence to support your conclusion. Blind following will simply not do. It is the duty of the disciple to correctly understand and explain the teachings of his gurudeva. You are all learned research scholars. You can examine the writings of Tulasi dasa for yourself. If you detect any mayavada conclusions in his writings then you should give evidence directly from his statements.

I have personally read and studied the Rama-carita-manasa in Hindi, in its entirety, at least ten times. May I ask how many times you have read Tulasi's original Ramayana with scrutiny? I am well acquainted with the conclusions of Vaisnava sastra and have been associating with pure Vaisnavas for a long time. My own conclusions, and the conclusions of other respected Vaisnavas in our line, is that there is no trace of mayavada anywhere in the original work of the Tulasi Ramayana. As I am travelling now, I do not have access to that book; but upon consulting it, I can surely provide you with concrete evidence from the direct statements of the book to support my position.

There are numerous statements in Srimad-Bhagavatam and other Vaisnava scriptures which may seem to support mayavada conclusions. In these sastras, the Absolute Truth is sometimes referred to as advaya-jnana, and kaivalya is sometimes spoken of as the ultimate destination. I quote here a verse and translation from Srila Swami Maharaja's Bhagavatam translation (4.22.27), which superficially seems to support the mayavada theory:

dagdhasayo mukta-samasta-tad-guno  
naivatmano bahir antar vicaste  
paratmanor yad-vyavadhanam purastat  
svapne yatha purusas tad-vinase

"When a person becomes devoid of all material desires and liberated from all material qualities, he transcends distinctions between actions executed externally and internally. At that time the difference between the soul and the Supersoul, which was existing before self-realization, is annihilated. When a dream is over, there is no longer a distinction between the dream and the dreamer."

Although this verse and others may be misinterpreted to support the mayavada theory, Srila Swami Maharaja has clearly explained its true Vaisnava conception in his commentary. For a correct understanding, individual verses must be understood in relationship to the overall presentation.

Sridhara Swami, the original Bhagavatam commentator, was sometimes accused of having mayavada leanings; yet Caitanya Mahaprabhu accepted him as being most authoritative. He said that anyone who disregarded the commentary of Sridhara Swami should be rejected as a prostitute, or one who does not follow his Swami. Similarly, there may be some statements of Tulasi dasa, which could be misinterpreted as supporting mayavada conclusions, but these then must be reconciled in relationship to his overall presentation of siddhanta.

Similarly, your letter has presented certain quotes by Srila Swami Maharaja, but I have here several quotes from him which present a different picture. The first one in fact pre-dates any you have given. In this quote Srila Swami Maharaja seems to suggest a very different conclusion about Tulasi dasa:

"So he became a great devotee of Rama, Tulasi dasa. His book, Rama-carita-manasa, 'Thinking always of Rama,' that is his book. It is very famous book, and that is the only important literature in the Hindi language, Rama-carita-manasa." (Room Conversation with Brahmananda, April 12, 1969)

And again, in another conversation, this is affirmed:

"Devotee: Tulasi dasa said that he wanted to see Rama.  
Prabhupada: Yes. That is devotee's inclination. That we must have." (Room Conversation SB 6.1.14 Nov 10, 1970 Bombay, India)

In two other instances Srila Swami Maharaja describes the conclusions of Rama-carita-manasa as being consistent with Vedic conclusions and based on sastras such as the Gita and Bhagavatam:

"And Tulasi dasa, he has also said... Tulasi dasa is big poet in Hindi language. He has written the Rama-carita-manasa. His opinion... Not only his opinion, that is the Vedic opinion, that... He says, dhol gamar stri sudra, pasu sudra nari, ei ei sab sasana ke adhikari (?). So this statement will not be very palatable to the Western girls." (Lecture SB 5.6.4 Nov 26, 1976 Vrndavana, India)

"The Tulasi dasa Ramayana means Rama-carita-manasa. It is not Ramayana. Rama-carita-manasa. He was devotee of Lord Ramacandra. So as he was thinking of Lord Ramacandra, he has written. So he was a learned scholar, brahmana, he must have read Bhagavad-gita, Bhagavatam. So all his translation is there on the basis of the sastra, especially Bhagavatam and Bhagavad-gita. You'll find many parallel passages. But Gita is the summary of all Vedic literature, and it is spoken by the Personality of Godhead." (Evening Darsana July 8, 1976 Washington DC)

Apart from the above quotes, I have also noted at least thirteen times when Srila Swami Maharaja has quoted Tulasi dasa's writings as positive authority in his books or lectures in order to substantiate a preaching point he was making. For brevity I have simply noted the references here and you may consult them at your own leisure. If Srila Swami Maharaja truly considered Tulasi dasa and his writing to be unauthorized, it appears odd that he would quote him so often in his preaching. The following are the references:

SB 6.11.4 Purport

BG 2.15 August 21, 1973 London Lecture

SB 1.16.19 July 19, 1974 Los Angeles, CA

SB 2.3.19 July 9, 1974 Los Angeles, CA

SB 2.9.7 April 24, 1972

SB 6.1.33 July 18, 1975 San Francisco, CA

SB 6.1.39 July 20, 1975 San Francisco, CA

SB 6.3.12-15 Lecture Feb 9, 1971 Gorakhpure, India

Morning Walk through BBT Warehouse – Feb 10, 1975 Los Angeles, CA

Morning Walk – May 25, 1976 Honolulu, HW

Arrival Room Conversation – July 2, 1976 Washington, DC  
Morning Walk – Feb 2, 1977 Bhubaneswar  
Room Conversation – April 19, 1977 Bombay, India

In addition to all the above quotes, I feel it necessary to respond to some of the quotes you have given as evidence against Tulasi dasa. On close inspection it is apparent that almost none of them really have anything negative to say about him or his Rama-carita-manasa. Furthermore, in many of the quotes you have omitted portions, which validate him. Please excuse me for pointing this out, but I think it is necessary to arrive at a proper understanding of the issue.

During a lecture in Montreal on Radhastami August 30 in 1968 my Srila Swami Maharaja quoted Tulasi dasa and referred to him as a great devotee: "...aprameyam anagham nirvana-santi-pradam brahma-sambhu-phanindras tebhyo 'nisam vedanta-vedyam vibhum sura-gurum maya-manusya-harim vande 'ham karunakaram raghu-varam bhu-pala-cudamanim: This is a verse composed by a great devotee, Tulasi dasa. He was a devotee of Lord Ramacandra."

You have also quoted a latter portion of the above quote. However, you did not quote it in full: "Our, this respectable Indian lady, she will begin Ramayana... This Tulasi, actually it is not Ramayana. It is called Rama-carita-manasa. Ramayana means Valmiki Ramayana, but people have taken it as Ramayana. Actually, Tulasi dasa has expressed his own feelings about his devotion to Lord Rama, and therefore he has named it Rama-carita-manasa, his mind full with service attitude for Lord Rama. That is the real meaning of this book. But people have misinterpreted; they are going on just it is Ramayana. And Ramayana, of course, anywhere where Rama's activities are described, that is called Ramayana. That is another sense. But real Ramayana means the Ramayana composed by Maharsi Valmiki. And this is... It is a popular notion that this is Ramayana, but actually this book is called Rama-carita-manasa. So some of the descriptions of Rama are there, but not all the description. Rather there are many differences from the original Valmiki Ramayana. Anyway this is song of a devotee for his Lord Rama. In that sense, you can call it Ramayana, but this book is actually Rama-carita-manasa."

This quote does not actually say anything negative about Tulasi dasa or his Rama-carita-manasa. It simply points out that there is a difference between the Valmiki Ramayana and the Rama-carita-manasa. It should be noted, however, that this work was an expression of his mind 'full with service attitude for Lord Rama.' The part of the quote, which you omitted, was the last two sentences: "This is a song of a devotee for his Lord Rama and so it may, in that sense, be called Ramayana."

In the next quote given by you, the only point made was that Tulasi dasa's Ramayana is but a partial representative of Srimad-Bhagavatam. The significant point, which you left out, was that Tulasi dasa was a devotee of Lord Rama and he gave his thoughts in his book Ramayana:

"From your book Soviet Studies of India I understand that academician Mr. A.P. Baranikov completed a great translation, working the matter of Tulasi dasa's Ramayana into Russian. Srimad-Bhagavatam is the ripe, mature fruit of the Vedic knowledge, and Tulasi dasa's Ramayana (Rama-carita-manasa) is but a partial representative of Srimad-Bhagavatam. The real Ramayana is Valmiki's Ramayana. Tulasi dasa was a devotee of Lord Rama and he has given his thoughts in his book Ramayana. But the real original thoughts and ideas are in Srimad-Bhagavatam." (Letter to Prof. Kotovsky June 24, 1971)

In the next quote given by you (which I have replicated in the next paragraph) there is no mention whatsoever of Tulasi dasa or his Rama-carita-manasa. When Srila Swami Maharaja states that there are many unauthorized Ramayanas, the reader is supposed to infer that he is referring to Tulasi dasa's version. Yet Srila Swami Maharaja goes on to say that five thousand years ago there were many Ramayanas. This part of the quote was not mentioned by you. Since Tulasi dasa's Rama-carita-manasa is a medieval work and was not published five thousand years ago, Srila Swami Maharaja certainly could not be referring to his book as one of the unauthorized versions. Most of the quotes which you give subsequently are in the same vein. There is no mention of Tulasi dasa, but the reader by this time automatically assumes that Rama-carita-manasa is being referred to as unauthorised.

"Unless one is tattva-darsi, in complete knowledge of the Absolute Truth, one cannot describe the activities of the Personality of Godhead. Therefore although there are many so-called Ramayanas, or histories of Lord Ramacandra's activities, some of them are not actually authoritative. Sometimes Lord Ramacandra's activities are described in terms of one's own imaginations, speculations or material sentiments. But the characteristics of Lord Ramacandra should not be handled as something imaginary. While describing the history of Lord Ramacandra, Sukadeva Gosvami told Maharaja Pariksit, "You have already hear about the activities of Lord Ramacandra." Apparently, therefore, five thousand years ago there were many Ramayanas, or histories of Lord Ramacandra's activities, and there are many still. But we must select only those books written by tattva-darsis (jnaninas tattva-darsinah), not the books of so-called scholars who claim knowledge only on the basis of a doctorate. This is a warning by Sukadeva Gosvami." (SB 9.10.3)

There is one quote remaining which offers a strong criticism of Tulasi dasa and his book. Yet this must be weighed against all of the positive statements. Without seeing the broader siddhantic view, how are we then to reconcile these apparently opposite opinions? How is it that Swami Maharaja has seen fit to give such an appreciation of Tulasi dasa as a bona fide Vaisnava?

The letter of 1969 which you quoted in your letter to me also needs to be put in its proper historical perspective:

"Regarding the two books you have mentioned, Sri Rama-carita-manasa by Gosvami Tulasi dasa is not very authorized, and Ramayana is authorized. One thing is though, you have got enough other books to study. Did you appear in the examination held on

Janmastami Day? Why should you go to Ramayana when you have got Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam and Teachings of Lord Caitanya? Don't divert your attention in that way. The author of Rama-carita-manasa, Gosvami Tulasi dasa, has a tint of mayavadi philosophy. He belongs to the Ramananda Sampradaya. They are mixed up combination of personalist and impersonalist. Therefore, the author is not considered as pure Vaisnava. Pure Vaisnava is free from all material contamination of fruitive activities and mental speculation. The pure Vaisnava is simply, purely disposed to transcendental loving service to Krsna. The pure Vaisnava rejects anything which has no pure idea of serving the Personality of Godhead." (Letter to: Raktaka, Hamburg, 6 September, 1969)

Of all the quotes you have presented as evidence against Tulasi dasa or his Rama-carita-manasa the only one that really stands as a substantial criticism is the one which I have reproduced in its entirety above. Consistent with your approach to discussing this topic you have selected only a portion of the quote. It may be noted also that this quote was made by Swami Maharaja only five months after the conversation in which he stated that Tulasi dasa was a great devotee of Rama and that this book is the only important literature in the Hindi language. Furthermore, this statement was made in 1969 when his disciples were very immature in their spiritual development without even having read Bhagavad-gita. The part of the letter which you omitted was that Swami Maharaja did not want his disciples' attention diverted when they had so many other books to read. It may also be questioned how authentic the English translations were they were reading. When we examine all of the positive statements that Srila Swami Maharaja made about Tulasi dasa and the Rama-carita-manasa, it appears that he simply wanted his disciples to focus on the books he was translating and not questionable translations of other books. This is the real crux of the matter, and not the authenticity of Tulasi dasa's work.

There is a misconception that the title of Tulasi dasa's book, Rama-carita-manasa, suggests that it was inspired from the manasa, or mind, of Tulasi dasa, and thus it is not a work of divine revelation. Yet in Srimad-Bhagavatam (1.7.4) we find the exact same word (manasi) used to describe the vision which inspired Srila Vyasadeva to write Srimad-Bhagavatam:

bhakti-yogena manasi  
samyak pranihite 'male  
apasyat purusam purnam  
mayam ca tad apasrayam

"By the power of bhakti-yoga Srila Vyasadeva, being firmly concentrated in meditation with a purified mind, saw Sri Krsna fully endowed with spiritual effulgence, with His plenary portions, and with His internal potency of svarupa-sakti. His external potency maya, being of an inferior nature, was seen in the background under His control."

It is said in this verse 'manasi apasyat,' that he saw the complete Absolute Truth with the mind. Yet Srimad-Bhagavatam is not to be taken as manasi-grantha, but rather as samadhi-grantha, for Vyasadeva's mind was fully absorbed in samadhi and his perception was by the power of bhakti-yoga. Similarly the Ramayana of Tulasi dasa should not be



taken as manasi-grantha for it sprung from his purified mind which was absorbed in complete samadhi by the power of bhakti-yoga.

Please forgive me if this letter has caused you any discomfort.

Vaisnava dasa anudasa,  
B.V. Narayana